

ESF Coordinator:

Department of Homeland Security

Support Agencies:

All

Primary Agency:

Department of Homeland
Security/Federal Emergency
Management Agency

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs ensures that sufficient Federal assets are deployed to the field during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the local populace. ESF #15 provides the resource support and mechanisms to implement the National Response Framework Incident Communications Emergency Policy and Procedures (ICEPP) described in the Public Affairs Support Annex. Additional information about External Affairs can be found in the ESF #15 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

The procedures outlined in this annex are consistent with the National Response Framework, which establishes policy; the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which addresses standardization; and the ESF #15 SOP, which outlines the guidance, protocols, and implementing tactics of the Joint Information System.

Scope

ESF #15 coordinates Federal actions to provide the required external affairs support to Federal, State, tribal, and local incident management elements. This annex details the establishment of support positions to coordinate communications to various audiences. ESF #15 applies to all Federal departments and agencies that may require incident communications and external affairs support or whose external affairs assets may be employed during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response.

The provisions of this annex apply to any incident for which the Secretary of Homeland Security decides to activate the annex, and any National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) response or other event designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs where significant interagency coordination is required.

ESF #15 integrates Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, Intergovernmental Affairs (State, tribal, and local coordination), Community Relations, and the private sector under the coordinating auspices of External Affairs. Another component, the Joint Information Center (JIC), ensures the coordinated release of information under ESF #15. The Planning and Products component of External Affairs develops all external and internal communications strategies and products for the ESF #15 organization. These functions are further described in the Concept of Operations section below and in the ESF #15 SOP.

ESF #15 provides the resources and structure for the implementation of the ICEPP. Incident communications actions contained in the ICEPP are consistent with the template established in the NIMS. Personnel who work under the auspices of External Affairs must be familiar with the provisions of ESF #15 in the event that the ESF is activated.

Policies

Federal planning for external affairs functions recognizes State, tribal, and local responsibilities for providing information to their citizens. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities. In the unlikely event that State, tribal, and local governments are unable to perform these responsibilities, the Federal Government may provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.

State, tribal, and local external affairs elements are fully integrated into ESF #15.

Since ESF #15 integrates various functional areas, primary and support agencies are required to participate in ESF #15 training and exercises to ensure that their personnel are able to execute their responsibilities and achieve unity of effort when the ESF is activated.

The external affairs efforts are coordinated in support of a unified message as directed by the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

ESF #15 identifies the procedures to resource the external affairs processes necessary for incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. External affairs resources are coordinated by the ESF #15 representatives in the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) as directed by the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. ESF #15 provides the Federal resource and implementation mechanisms to ensure delivery of messages developed in coordination with interagency public affairs officials and the Domestic Readiness Group (DRG). The staff of the DHS Office of Public Affairs (OPA) coordinates messages with public affairs representatives from all involved departments and agencies. (See the Public Affairs Support Annex for more detail.)

General

ESF #15 Officer: ESF #15 provides the External Affairs Officer to the Unified Coordination Staff during an incident requiring a coordinated Federal response. The External Affairs Officer, or ESF #15 Officer, serves as the primary external affairs advisor to the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO)/Federal Resource Coordinator, Unified Coordination Group, and Principal Federal Official (PFO), if designated. ESF #15 may provide the same support to a National Special Security Event.

The External Affairs Officer reports to the ESF #15 Director and the Unified Coordination Group. Specific duties include coordinating and developing the external affairs and communications strategy in support of the Unified Coordination Group and the Incident Action Plan; coordinating the external affairs information flow within the Joint Field Office (JFO) and among other Federal, State, tribal, and local counterparts; and facilitating site visits by governmental officials, foreign dignitaries, and other VIPs. The External Affairs Officer differs from a press secretary, which may be assigned to directly support a PFO, when designated.

Emergency Support Function #15 – External Affairs Annex

Resource	Supports ESF #15 by:
External Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing support and advice to the FCO/Federal Resource Coordinator, the PFO (if appointed), and other members of the Unified Coordination Group.• Conducting communications planning through an Incident Action Plan with incident-specific guidance and objectives.
Public Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinating messages with Federal, State, tribal, and local governments and establishing a Federal JIC. (See the Public Affairs Support Annex for the types of JICs that can be established for incident communications.)• Gathering information on the incident.• Providing incident-related information through the media and other sources in accessible formats and multiple languages to individuals, families, businesses, and industries directly or indirectly affected by the incident.• Monitoring news coverage to ensure that accurate information is disseminated.• Handling appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for incident area tours by government officials and other dignitaries.• Providing basic services, such as communications and supplies, to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public.• Overseeing the key function of media relations.
Community Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducting the external affairs function in a joint manner between Federal, State, and tribal personnel, when available. Field teams are organized and dispersed throughout the affected area. Teams include trained Federal, State, tribal, and, if necessary, locally hired persons who know the community.• Coordinating closely with the affected State(s) to identify community leaders (e.g., grassroots, political, religious, disability, educational, tribal, business, labor, ethnic) and neighborhood advocacy groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, identify unmet needs, establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange, and facilitate collaborative Federal, State, tribal, and local planning and mutual support for disaster recovery.• Deploying management and field officers simultaneously with other initial elements as directed by the ESF #15 coordinator at the JFO.
Congressional Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishing contact with congressional offices representing affected areas to provide information on the incident.• Organizing an initial interagency congressional briefing within 18 hours of the event when possible and conducting daily briefings thereafter.• Arranging for incident site visits for Members of Congress and their staffs.• Responding to congressional inquiries.• Assisting in the development of written materials for presentations and making congressional notifications.• Coordinating with the local liaison officers on all congressional affairs issues to ensure coordinated efforts.
State and Local Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting Federal interaction with State and local governments.• Implementing a system of information-sharing among Federal, State, and local governments.• Informing State and local elected and appointed officials on response efforts, protocols, and recovery programs.• Disseminating information with the assistance of State municipal leagues, county associations, and tribal governments.

Resource	Supports ESF #15 by:
Tribal Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting Federal interaction with tribal governments on all aspects of incident management operations and reporting directly to the External Affairs Officer or Unified Coordination Group. Supporting the Tribal Relations Element when established with incident-specific subject-matter experts from other departments and agencies, if and when required. When appropriate, establish a Tribal Relations Information Element within the Tribal Relations Element to manage the timely flow of information to and from the tribes involved in the incident. Organizing and managing a Tribal Relations Field Component to facilitate Federal Government relations with tribal governments and their incident management organizations, communities, victims, and tribal advocacy groups.
Planning and Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing communications Incident Action Plans and messages. Educating the public in the aftermath of an incident requiring a coordinated Federal response through news advisories, press releases, and prepared materials.
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector Coordinating Councils (SCCs) working with established information-sharing mechanisms identify individual(s) to serve as incident communications coordinators for their respective sector. Representatives serve as the primary reception and transmission point for incident communications products from DHS Public Affairs/Sector-Specific Agencies, and retain the responsibility for dissemination to counterpart communicators within their sector. Associations that have similar roles to the critical infrastructure and key resources SCCs will also identify incident communications contact points for dissemination as above for their members.

ORGANIZATION

The DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, in coordination with the NRCC, activates and directs ESF #15 procedures. The DHS/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Office of Public Affairs designates a DHS/FEMA Public Affairs staff member as an ESF #15 representative to staff the NRCC as directed. When activated, ESF #15 activities are implemented in coordination with the DHS OPA components of the National Operations Center and DRG. The ESF #15 coordinator alerts additional supporting departments and agencies to provide representatives to the appropriate ESF #15 location, or to provide representatives who are immediately available via telecommunications (e.g., telephone, fax, conference calls) to provide support.

The DHS Public Affairs Coordination Center, or Ready Room, will serve as the Federal incident communications coordination center during incidents. The virtual Federal interagency team and National Incident Communications Conference Line are controlled from the Ready Room.

External affairs components co-locate with the Unified Coordination Staff as designated in the National Response Framework. ESF #15 components provide appropriate representatives available to deploy rapidly to the incident location.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Primary Agency: DHS/FEMA

Resources provided by DHS/FEMA in support of ESF #15 missions include:

- **Emergency Alert System (EAS):** The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designed the EAS as a tool for the President to quickly send important emergency information to the Nation using radio, television, and cable systems. The EAS may also be used by State, tribal, and local authorities to deliver alerts and warnings. The EAS is required to deliver all EAS messages visually and aurally to be accessible to persons with hearing and vision disabilities. While the FCC is tasked with the regulatory authority over EAS, DHS/FEMA is the EAS executive agent for the White House. As such, DHS/FEMA is responsible for the overall operation of EAS.
- **Activation and Operation of National-Level EAS:** After a Presidential activation order is issued, DHS/FEMA can access the facilities of broadcast stations and other communications providers across the Nation within several minutes.
- **State and Local Government Use:** The EAS is available for State, tribal, and local use, but such use is voluntary on the part of the EAS participant, and would be preempted by a national activation. State and local governments maintain supporting plans to cover EAS operations. DHS/FEMA coordinates EAS management issues with State and local authorities.
- **Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS):** DHS/FEMA MERS provides mobile telecommunications, operational support, life support, and power generation assets for the onsite management of all-hazard activities. MERS provides a deployable broadcast radio capability for multimedia communications, information processing, logistics, and operational support to Federal, State, and local authorities during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. MERS is a valuable recovery resource to update the public and affected population.
- **National Preparedness Network (PREPnet):** PREPnet is a DHS/FEMA television broadcast network capable of reaching large portions of the public in an impacted area with survival and recovery information before, during, and after catastrophic events. PREPnet delivers information via cable television, satellite services, personal digital devices, cell phones, and webcasts to both the public at large and to emergency responders. As a scalable DHS asset, PREPnet capabilities span a spectrum from simple public service announcements on up to 24/7 broadcast of recovery information to victims wherever they may have relocated.
- **Recovery Radio Support:** When commercial broadcast is impaired in an area, DHS/FEMA works with local broadcasters to set up Recovery Radio support, which provides official information hourly, several times a day, about the incident response and recovery effort by offering a pool feed to local stations. Distribution can be provided through the EAS network. All broadcasters are required to have equipment to monitor and air EAS programs, and most primary EAS stations have portable, remote pick-up equipment that can be installed in the JIC. Alternatively, telephone or two-way radio can be used to deliver programming to the EAS distribution point. The Recovery Radio Network is implemented by a team whose size depends on the scope of the incident.

SUPPORT AGENCIES

Agency	Functions
Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)	NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information direct from a nearby National Weather Service (NWS) office. NWR broadcasts NWS warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day. In conjunction with the EAS, NWR provides an “all-hazards” radio network, making it a single source for comprehensive weather and emergency information. NWR also broadcasts warning and postevent information for all types of hazards: natural (e.g., earthquakes and volcano activity), manmade (such as chemical or environmental incidents), and terrorism-related.
Department of Justice, Community Relations Service	The Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice, through a DHS/FEMA mission assignment, can provide conciliation and mediation training and technical assistance in matters of race, color, or national origin; conflict resolution; problem solving; cultural awareness; and community tension assessments.
Corporation for National and Community Service	Provides teams of trained National Service Participants (including AmeriCorps members, Learn and Serve America volunteers, and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program volunteers) to carry out a wide range of response and recovery support activities emphasizing disadvantaged communities and special needs populations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information distribution, canvassing, and needs assessment. • Shelter and service center support. • Unaffiliated volunteer coordination. • Call center support. • Other appropriate activities identified by ESF #15 coordinators or the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison.
American Red Cross	The American Red Cross is a support agency under the National Response Framework in a number of Emergency Support Functions, most notably ESF #6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services. The Red Cross works with State and local authorities to function as a direct provider of disaster relief services including emergency sheltering, feeding, basic first aid support, mental health counseling, and disaster assessment. Under ESF #8 – Public Health and Medical Services, the Red Cross serves to support the Department of Health and Human Services in the provision of blood products.
Other Departments and Agencies	Depending on the nature and scope of the incident, all Federal departments and agencies support the National Response Framework and are responsible for providing appropriate support for ESF #15 as required.